A HARD CITIZEN AND HIS SIDE OF IT.

THE RECORD OF A MAN WHO SHOOTS—HE LIVES NEAR THE "JUMPING OFF" PLACE, AND HAS A PRIVATE GRAVEYARD OF THIRTEEN—"THE OLD MAN AIN'T TAKIN' ANY PLEASURE IN HIS MEMORY."

BY HAMLIN GARLAND.

Laredo, Tex., is suitably called the jumping off place, because when the traveler has arrived there he is prepared for any extremity—he jumps into the mystery of Mexico indifferently if not gladly. He is like unto a man sick of sea-sickness—it matters little what follows or if anything follows.

From San Antonio (which is worth while) you enter upon a land of constantly increasing growth of cactus and proportionately decreasing grass. There are no trees save the mesquite, which is merely brush. The land is uninhabited for the most part with here and there a Mexican hut set in the chapparal, lonesome, desolate.

From this high, droughty level the train dips a little and slides down into the shadow valley of the Rio Grande and discloses Laredo, which the traveler's eye sees at once to be a mixture of the Kansas frontier town, the southern town and the Mexican-Indian village. These elements are stirred together without regard to consistency. The mixture is lumpy.

There is no rain, very little grass and no trees in Laredo, but there are saloons and mescal and gamblers and politicians in abundance. Once there was much trading and shooting in the days when the cattle business made this its supply point. Now it is sadly quiet. It is famous merely for the quality of its cockroaches, which a few of its sporting citizens are willing to back against the world, notwithstanding the defeat they sustained by the cockroaches of San Antonio. However, there was not a fair fight, for San Antonio had fed their "birds" on a peculiar paste, which made them heavy with muscle and filled them with bare-sark courage. This defeat broke the town and filled the sky with lurid clouds.

Laredo is "hot in March and hell in the summer." Travelers who spend an hour there while their luggage is being examined by the customs department spend their time in cussing the town and the negro restaurant keeper across the way, who sells blue milk for 20 cents per quart. It blows there in Laredo and the dust streams like water and burns like hot ashes. The sun is directly overhead and enormous—livid with heat.

However, just as one's sufferings are getting really inexpressible, the Mexican conductor softly roars "Vamanose!" and the train slides across the Rio Grande and after a few minutes more of wait begins to climb the slope toward the mountains, and suffering is over. The rest is a delight. Every mile lifts you into a finer, clearer atmosphere.

Opposite me in the car sat a man of middle age in a farmer-like suit of clothes, but I perceived he wore a cattleman's boots. He seemed to be in deep thought and I paid very little attention to him until the conductor came through. He was a young man and a Texan by speech. He addressed the middle-aged man cordially.

"Why, how de do, Mr. Baker?"

"First rate, Tom—how's everything with you?"

"First rate. I heard you had some trouble with that last bunch of cattle."

"I did. They got up to Tampy all right and then a cussed tornado struck 'em night before last and they stampeded. I've got a dozen men out after 'em. I reckon they'll bring 'em in. Did you see anything of 'em?"

"They've got about fifty head at Santiago. I noticed them when I came up yesterday."

I was interested in this talk about cattle, and a little later I went over and spoke to the old man. Finding me familiar with the cattle business, he grew friendly and told me his plans. He was buying "feeders" in Mexico and shipping them to Indian Territory to fatten. He was a man of intelligence, an excellent talker, and a cattleman of wide experience. I found him very interesting. His eyes were a pleasant gray with a shadow of sadness in them and his voice was quiet and agreeable. He spoke always with decision and with unusually graphic figures of speech. He was going to get off at Santiago and visit a rancher some twenty miles back toward the mountains. It seemed to me to be a most interesting trip, and I said: "I wish I could go with you."

He seemed to be pleased. "I wish you would," he said. "I'll take care of ye. I'll have the best horse that can be got for ye to ride and it won't cost ye a cent."

"I'm sorry, but I can't do it, Mr. Baker. I'm due in Monterey and I can't spare the time. I'd like nothing better, but it's out of the question now. Perhaps I can when I come back."

It would have been a fine trip, the ride off toward the dark-blue flat-iron mountains to the west; out among those mysterious Mexicans who looked like hooded monks and whose eyes glittered in the shadow of their hats with sinister interest in the Americanos.

After I left him the old man attempted to lounge in his seat for a dope. Something seemed to annoy him and he fumbled around his belt for a moment and after some effort drew out an enormous revolver and a formidable belt of cartridges which he put in the hat rack. This seemed to ease him and he drew his hat over his eyes and apparently dropped off to sleep.

One of the passengers a few minutes later took a seat beside me and said:

"Do you know who you've been talking to?"

"No. His name is Baker, I think I heard the conductor say."

"That man's got a private grave yard of thirteen. He's considered one of the most dangerous men in Texas. His name is 'Hank' Baker."

I looked a little incredulous. "Thirteen? Isn't that one too many. I rather took a fancy to him. He seemed like a nice, quiet farmer."

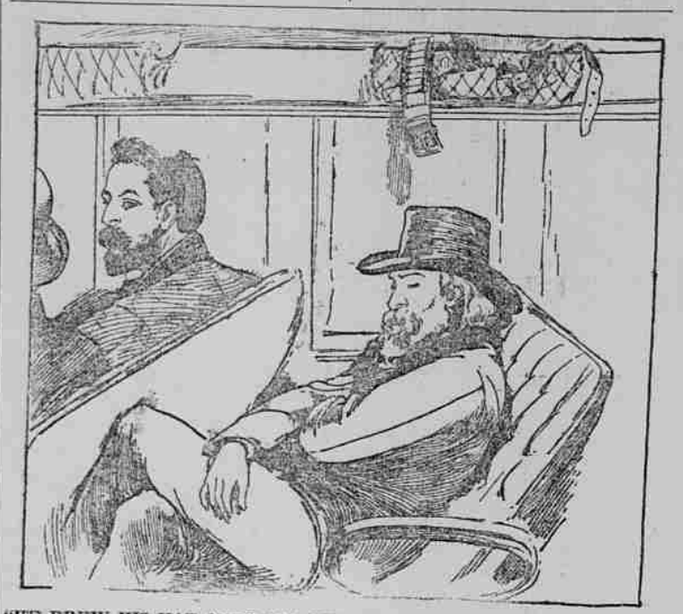
"Well, he is, until somebody tries to bulldoze him, or when he gets full, which ain't often, to tell the truth about it, especially of late years. Say, Tom," he said to the conductor, "How many men has the old man killed?"

The conductor hesitated. "Well; I don't know. They say he's killed nine, but the only ones I know about are the two editors in Austin and the Pullman porter. I used to work for the old man as a cow puncher. I never had any complaint to make. He treated me right."

I saw a story ahead and settled to listen.

The passenger, a drummer from New Orleans, resumed: "I don't say the old man wasn't justified. Probably they were all killed in a fight and he had the quickest hand. You noticed how small his hands are. I never saw the old man when he wasn't just as you see him, quiet, pleasant spoken and mighty accommodating."

"I don't know how the got the reputation of being a 'bad man,' but when I came to San Antonio he was pointed out to me as a man with a record. I think his first man was killed in a fight over a fence. You know there was a time here when some of the



"HE DREW HIS HAT OVER HIS EYES AND APPARENTLY DROPPED OFF TO SLEEP."

ranchers tried to fence in their range and then the cattlemen would cut the wires and hitch their ropes to it and snake it into piles. Well, the old man's first mix up, I've been told, was in one of those scrapes. Somebody tried to cut his fence or he tried to cut somebody else's fence—don't matter, two or three men died, and it wasn't Baker.

"Then the next trouble that I know about was in San Antonio. Two chaps came out from South Carolina, I think it was, and started a paper. Shortly after Baker was being talked of for sheriff and the young fellers—the Parker boys, were for another man, and thought it would be good politics to 'air Baker's record.' Well, maybe it was good politics, but it was d—n bad judgment. They came out one week with a three-column article detailing all the mixes Baker'd ever been in and some imaginary ones, like enough.

The old man had a nice wife and a little family growing up and he didn't want any more trouble, so he said nothing. But the next week they whooped up another blast. Then the old man went to a friend of theirs and said: 'Johnson, I wish you'd go and see them boys and tell 'em they better let up on me. I don't mind one or two such things, but I don't want it to keep up all the fall.'

"Johnson knew what that meant, so he went to the young fellers. 'Boys,' he said, 'you had better drop the Baker hunt. The old man is a killer. He won't fool much. He takes the thing in earnest.'

"'Well, we hope he does,' they cut back. 'We mean business. This town has been terrorized by such men long enough. We came from a state where they know how to shoot, too. We're not Boston tenderfeet.'

"'That's all right, too,' Johnson says, 'but you mustn't run up against Baker. He'll kill ye, sure's hell. Now I've made my little plea. I'm done.'

"But they only laughed at the old man and the very next issue of the paper they put out a scorch-blisterer. It was a go-gimsey. Baker was away, but a couple of days later he came into town and everybody knew by the set of his jaws that he was huntin' big game.

"The editors were just startin' to attend some convention or political meeting. The train was at the station all ready to pull out when Baker walked into the front end of the car. They see him and begin shootin', but Lord bless ye! the old man killed 'em in two turns of his wrist. They couldn't more'n get their little popgus out.

"O, yes, they arrested him and tried him, but there was a dozen men to swear they'd heard the deceased say they could take care of themselves—and then they both had guns in their hands—and this is Texas, so Baker went clear.

"Well, the next thing he did was to kill a nigger. It happened like this: The old man was agoing down to El Paso on the Sunset limited, and he got off at Smiths to talk to a rancher on business. He was still talking when the train started and he held on as long as he could, calculating to catch onto the last car. He would 'a' made it all right only the Pullman nigger was a gassin' with somebody on the platform and was playing to catch the same step as Baker. They both tried for it and the nigger being just a scratch ahead, caught on and crooked his elbow and pushed Baker off. The old man rolled over once, but when he got up he killed that nigger while he grinned.

"We-ell—you know how it is. Being a nigger he'd no business to have pushed Baker off anyway—he should 'a' helped him. He was one o' those fresh niggers, anyhow, and so Baker was cleared again. I haint heard of his bein' in any bad mix since. The old man kind 'o wants to live out the rest of his days in peace. His children, two little girls, are getting grown up now and it 'aint funny to have other kids yellin' 'Hi hi—your pa killed a man. Your pa killed a man!' You know how the little cusses will rub a thing like that in on another kid. The old man knows this and he knows, too, that Texas has had too damn much handy work with guns. It don't do the state any good to have men killed by a twist of the wrist. On all these accounts the old man aint taken any pleasure in his memory.

"I don't like that shootin' the nigger myself. The two smart alicks I don't mourn over, but a nigger ain't very big game. I know it was mighty exasperating to have a dam coon do a thing like that and grin over it, but it's like shootin' sheep—no sport in it. I'd a' waited until that feller came back and then I'd a' flounced hell out of him with a raw hide. But Baker was mad and his gun was handy and his hand dead sure—and there's y'r nigger rollin' off the step like a sack o' coal. So let it go. I like Baker and I ain't goin' to lay it up against him."

Outside the darkness came down and the train drove straight ahead into mystery. It passed by villages of thatched roofs, wattled corrals, and flickering camp-fires surrounded by dim figures. The ruralese hooded in their military cloaks walked like monks out for an airing, clasping their Winchesters in their arms. Under the explanatory talk of my friend, the country grew sinister with cutthroat Mexicans, smugglers, Indian half-breeds, "water bound" Texans and drunken vaqueroes. I eyed Baker with new interest and when he awakened a few minutes later I went over to talk to him again.

His face was sad—unmistakably sad. He had the same look I saw in the face of a man in Cripple Creek who had taken human life. He did not like to be pointed out as a man who had killed men. He had no air of bravado. He shrank from anything like it. He tried to forget his dark deeds and to make others forget them. There was a marked delicacy about his hands and feet. He was not a coarse ruffian. Conceivably he might have been attractive in his youth—slender, hot-tempered, and yet in a way generous and chivalrous. He was now thin and bent, and bearded, with a russet tone on hair and hat and beard and coat which showed his constant contact with the sun and wind. That he had his justification I could not doubt and I was eager to hear what he would say for himself. But the train whistled We drew up to another of those forbidding little villages swarming with unaccountable and apparently ferocious personalities. Baker arose and buckled on his revolver.

"This is my station. I wish you could come with me."

"I wish I could," I repeated. "But I've got too much to do now before it gets too hot. I'll plan to stop when I come back."

"Well, good luck."

We shook hands. "Good luck to you."

As he went out on the platform several of the dark-faced blanketed figures surrounded him and as the train drew out I felt a genuine sense of regret that I could not ride out into that wonderful country with him. Certainly I should not feel and fear of other men while in his company. Besides there was promise of exciting scenes with horse and broad-horn. However, the fictive imagination could travel the road with greater safety.